

Virginia and Maryland Public Safety Agencies Share Best Practices in Social Media

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The use of social media in public safety has increased in popularity over the past year. Citizens, volunteer organizations, and government agencies continue to turn to tools like Facebook and Twitter before, during, and after emergencies for collaboration, information sharing, preparedness and health education, crime reporting, and more. As government agencies turn to social media, however, concerns regarding the safety and security of these new technologies remain. The need for guidance, policy development, and best practices is evident.

To address these concerns, first response groups and individuals across the nation are working to develop guidance and share lessons learned. For example, in addition to a [countywide social media policy](#), the Fairfax County Police Department in Virginia is developing a policy to guide the department's use of social media and working with partners to share and discuss best practices. On March 5, the Fairfax County Police Department announced the launch of its Twitter profile, @fairfaxpolice, to encourage a culture of engagement and gain valuable public feedback from County citizens. It also uses Twitter to announce news releases, updates to the website, information on public meetings, important alerts, the most wanted fugitive list, and safety tips.

To learn more about social media best practices, the Fairfax County Police Department invited Anthony Guglielmi, Public Affairs Director for the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) and veteran Tweeter, to speak at a roundtable discussion with Fairfax County Police personnel and regional public information officers (PIOs) in Northern Virginia on March 27. With an extensive background in communications for law enforcement, government agencies, and the private sector, Guglielmi shared the highs and lows of BPD's use of Twitter and offered advice on messaging during crisis situations and day-to-day management.

BPD began using social media in 2009 when the Police Commissioner challenged the agency to engage the community and make them a partner in fighting crime. Before BPD began using social media, the BPD PIO had to field multiple calls from media outlets throughout the course of an event. Now, with the help of social media, the PIO can push information out and reach all outlets at once. BPD uses Ustream, an online live video stream, to air all press conferences and to report information from the crime scene via its website, <http://www.baltimorepolice.org>.

The community has access to information at all times on the department's website, where BPD broadcasts on its own news channel, "BPDTV." Using smartphones to capture video from the field, BPD uses Ustream, a free video streaming tool, to publish directly from the field



to its website, where the community can view daily newscasts and archived episodes whenever they choose. Instead of having information cut into small sound bites on a traditional newscast, Guglielmi said they broadcast their press conferences on line. In addition to Twitter and Ustream, BPD uses Facebook to share videos, photos, news updates, and encourage community dialogue, YouTube for public service announcements, and LinkedIn for recruitment. BPD also supports its online outreach with in-person engagement. Each of the nine Baltimore



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Police districts has a neighborhood services liaison who works directly with the community. The liaisons meet with headquarters once a month to share citizen concerns, facilitate crime walks in each neighborhood, and hold weekly meetings with the community to share crime information.

Guglielmi attributes his agency's success in using social media to strong leadership support and the fact that the PIO office is positioned directly beneath the Commissioner and endowed with the authority of his office. He continues to work with the Maryland State Police, regional PIOs, and other partners to share best

practices and lessons learned, and to establish and maintain relationships across the region.

Information for this article was provided by the Department of Homeland Security Virtual Social Media Working Group (VSMWG), which continues to develop policy guidance on the safe and sustainable use of social media. The DHS VSMWG engages the public safety community in this discussion via the online collaboration platform DHS First Responder Communities of Practice. To visit the platform, please visit <http://www.FirstResponder.gov>. To request membership to join, please visit <https://communities.firstresponder.gov>.